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ABSTRACT

Directed to college of education faculty members, this paper provides practical advice for developing model education projects by means of interagency cooperation. The first section describes the numerous Macomb Projects that have received state and federal funding including Handicapped Children's Early Education Program funding. Projects focus on early childhood education and handicapped children and include home-based early intervention, a computer curriculum, personnel preparation, and an interagency network for high-risk infants. Following sections discuss the university conditions necessary for project development and ways to establish community and university support. Seventeen strategies for creating and maintaining a networking system are listed. Points covered include establishing positive administrative support in the lead agency, deciding on an overall goal, developing faculty and grant teams, fostering open communication, and providing for effective information dissemination. A list of "secrets" of successful agency coordination stresses the team approach, administrative commitment to interagency cooperation, and mutual trust among individuals in the cooperating agencies. A flowchart and diagram help illustrate and explain Western Illinois University College of Education's Rural Special Education Network. (JHZ)

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Creating and Maintaining a Rural Networking System

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Special Education Network

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MACOMB PROJECTS

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Western Illinois University College of Education Special Education Network

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Creating and Maintaining a Rural Networking System

The basic assumptions and operating system for the Western Illinois University College of Education Special Education Network, represented by the Macomb Projects, are based of social psychology's game theory. Simply stated, in a win-win game, the results benefit everyone.

Description of Macomb Projects

The Macomb 0-3 Rural Project was funded as a model demonstration project through Handicapped Children's Early Education Program (HCEEP) from 1975-1978. Staff developed a home-based early intervention model program for handicapped and at-risk children aged birth to 3 and their families in rural West Central Illinois. Upon obtaining local funding for the program through the McDonough County Rehabilitation Center, the project received Outreach funding and has conducted awareness activities, developed and disseminated products and provided replication training and technical assistance to early intervention programs nationwide since that time. In 1980 the project received approval from the Joint Dissemination Review Panel (JDRP), thus making it a part of the National Diffusion Network of exemplary programs, the only rural infant project funded by HCEEP to have been validated as such.

During the past ~~ten~~ 12 years, the project director has provided much input to the State Board of Education Early Childhood State Plan, advocacy organizations such as ARC and UCP, the Governor's Planning Council on Developmental Disabilitities (GPCDD), and the Higher Education Advisory Committee regarding early childhood education and early intervention. She directed several studies of early childhood services in Illinois and completed the State of the Art Study of Birth to Three Services in Illinois for the GPCDD.

The Outreach: Macomb 0-3 Rural Project is only one of several programs which make up Macomb Projects. Project ACTT: Activating Children Through Technology has completed 3 years as a model demonstration HCEEP-funded project, developing a computer curriculum for use with young handicapped children, and is now going into Outreach. Project M.U.S.E: Microcomputer Use in Special Education and MUSE Trainer Project, both personnel preparation projects, train teachers to utilize computer technology in special education and regular classrooms. The Western Illinois University Birth to Three Personnel Preparation Training Project is a personnel preparation project funded to develop and provide competency-based and field-based coursework for early interventionists and for pre-service training. Project RAIN: Rural Assist Infant Network was awarded funding as an interagency based infant demonstration project from the Illinois State Board of Education.

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Necessary University Conditions

Within the university, establish strong colleagual relations related to ongoing work. A synergistic element is essential. A strong, functional faculty team is an integral part of establishing a networking system and also represents a condition which must carry over to project teams. Each of the faculty team members brings specific areas of expertise. A faculty team with a minimum of one member who has at least five years of experience within the system and who holds a rank high enough to influence the system as well as credibility to develop innovative programs is useful. A faculty member who either sits on key committees or has easy access to key committees is useful. Knowing how to get new coursework started within the university is an important skill for the team. Establishing a functional grant writing team is essential in order to develop funding for ongoing projects.

The administrative atmosphere at the university needs to be one that facilitates. This includes facilitation of grant production and management, program development (to establish coursework), space, materials, and interaction with outside agencies. Facilitation is important at the department level, college level, and university level. At best this structure is positive, but it must at least be neutral. A negative or punishing administrative structure makes networking such as ours very difficult or impossible. When administrators change, sometimes the agreements and arrangements also change. It <u>will</u> happen, so when it does, be prepared to establish open communication with the new individual. Much networking depends on knowing one another and knowing what the other person can do and will do. This is true both within and without the university no matter what the formal chain of command is supposed to be. Both formal and informal power structures within the university need to be assessed by the faculty team in order to understand and devise strategies to accomplish project goals.

Necessary Conditions for Securing Cooperation

Establish trust and credibility in the community AND in the university. Longevity may be the key. Working and living in the area over a period of time and having your family grow up in the area eventually helps gain trust. Longevity also means that you may have trained the people you are working with in new projects as either undergraduates or graduates. These people like to feel that they are skillful enough that you want to work with them, but you need to maintain close contacts, visit them in their space, and plan social contacts too. Establishing trust also means that you are on a first name, going-to-lunch basis and exchange materials and resources.

When community agencies ask you to do something, DO it, and do it well. Then plan further activities. Sit on agency boards when invited, then help them get things done that need to be done. Also ask agencies for their help. School and agency personnel serve on advisory councils for our project. They call on us when they think there is a grant we could help them write. If we have a grant we want to write, we call them. Administrators trust us to write grants and frequently mention our "proven track record." When they ask us to help them with grant writing, we make an extra effort to help. This extra

effort carries into any kind of activities we are asked to help with, including inservices and preschool screenings. Tell them you need their help--and mean it!

Always respond to requests from parent groups. University people have to be willing to get out into the field and "get their hands dirty." This means university faculty need to be willing to work alongside service delivery staff. Establishing functional connections with people in the field also means that you can get things done more easily and quickly. Trade services. For example, we train staff at Warren Achievement Center on computer use. They work with us on assessing severely handicapped children, field testing our curriculum and the computer record keeping CORE, and providing consultation and direct work on sophisticated computer interfaces.

Make sure everybody gets credit for their ideas and input. Make the agencies look good. Set up cooperative activities that are beneficial to all involved. Disseminate information about activities, but only after all the players know its being done. Don't surprise anybody! Depend upon open communication and full information disclosure so that no one thinks that there is something going on behind the scenes.

What to Do to Get Things Going

Begin with an overall emphasis. For example, the Macomb Projects started with an emphasis on early childhood and handicapped children. The major activities focused on direct services, inservice and preservice training, and the development of new university coursework. After seven years we added another dimension, microcomputers, which again focused on the major activities we initially targeted for the early childhood population. Starting with one major emphasis, then building on it, with a network of related activities, has provided continuity and some consistency among the various projects. Providing a service that is useful to a community is an important element, but if it is also one they couldn't do by themselves, benefits increase. Maintain an image that shows you as someone who does not have to have all the credit for something. Don't blow your own horn. It doesn't go over well in rural communities in practice.

When you find an acceptable cause, keep track of what is going on at the state and national level so that the group you work with has enough information to respond to important issues. Sometimes those issues are legislative and policy related and at other times they are related to agency priorities. Issues often lead to possible funding for activities. Maintain contacts with legislators.

Operate on the assumption that there are always alternatives. Look for new ways of establishing relationship. Go out of your way to avoid adversarial positions with anyone. Communicate needs well ahead of time, then you can get things done quickly when time is short.

Strategies for Creating and Maintaining a Networking System

Basically, there are a few strategies to follow for establishing and maintaining an ongoing networking system. They are as follows:

1. Establish positive, facilitative administrative support in lead agency.
2. Decide on an overall goal (i.e., working with young handicapped children) and then expand as resources become available.
3. Establish a functional faculty and grant team upon which to build.
4. Establish local, regional, state, and national contacts with decision makers in the field.
5. Establish an informal open communication system among all participants.
6. Build an information dissemination system.
7. Build an information gathering system.
8. Establish credibility and trust in the university, community, and region.
9. Be a team player with other professionals.
10. Become a resource to others--an expert in the field.
11. Create a functional interagency reliance system.
12. Serve on and use others for advisory council membership.
13. Identify new relationships among ideas, groups, and projects as activities expand.
14. Accomplish activities that benefit the community.
15. Provide ways for everybody involved to benefit from activities.
16. Make the best possible use of available resources.
17. Identify sources of power and alternative strategies to influence them.

SOME NOT-SO-SECRET SECRETS OF SUCCESSFUL AGENCY COORDINATION

*Cooperation is the result of individual people interacting in mutally satisfying ways. Establish a team approach.

*There is mutual give and take that isn't always 50-50, but we aren't concerned with who gives more since over time we all benefit and give as much as we take. Provide ways for everyone to benefit.

*There is a firm commitment to cooperation at the adminstrative level of both agencies.

*Establish mutual trust among individuals in both agencies.
- -A past history of cooperation is helpful.
- -Develop a needed activity, the DO it.
- -Spend time DOING rather than talking.
- -Get to know people on an informal, "going-to-lunch" basis.
- -When people ask you to do something, DO it and do it as well as you can.
- -Give everyone credit for the good things.

*Identify skills of key people in each agency. Mesh skills. Not everyone needs to have the same skills... it's better when they don't, for each one KNOWS what he or she contributes. Identify contributions clearly.

*Establish open communication. Keep everyone informed. Don't surprise people.

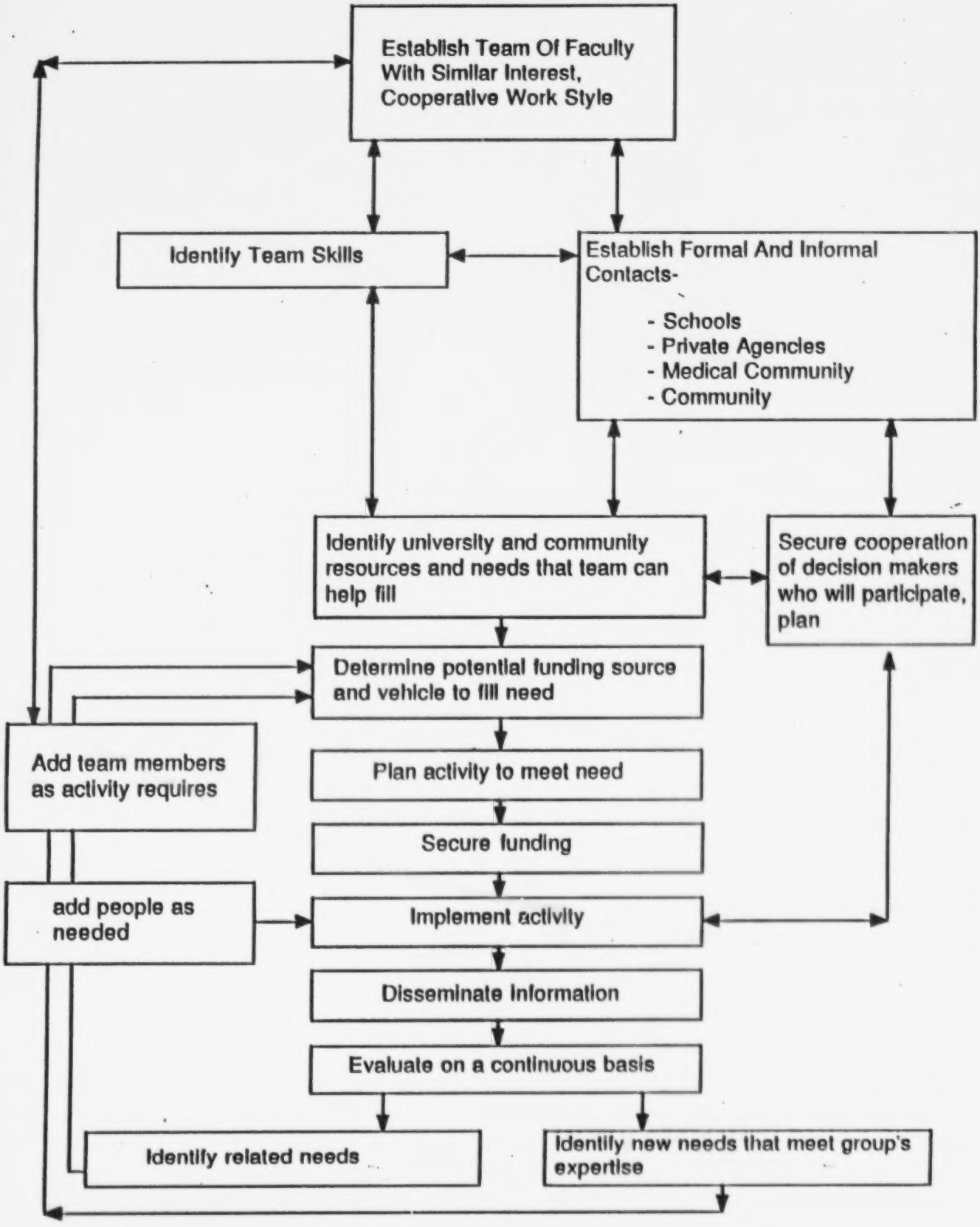
*Establish mutually acceptable short term and long term goals.

*Look for new relationships among ideas that lead to new activities.

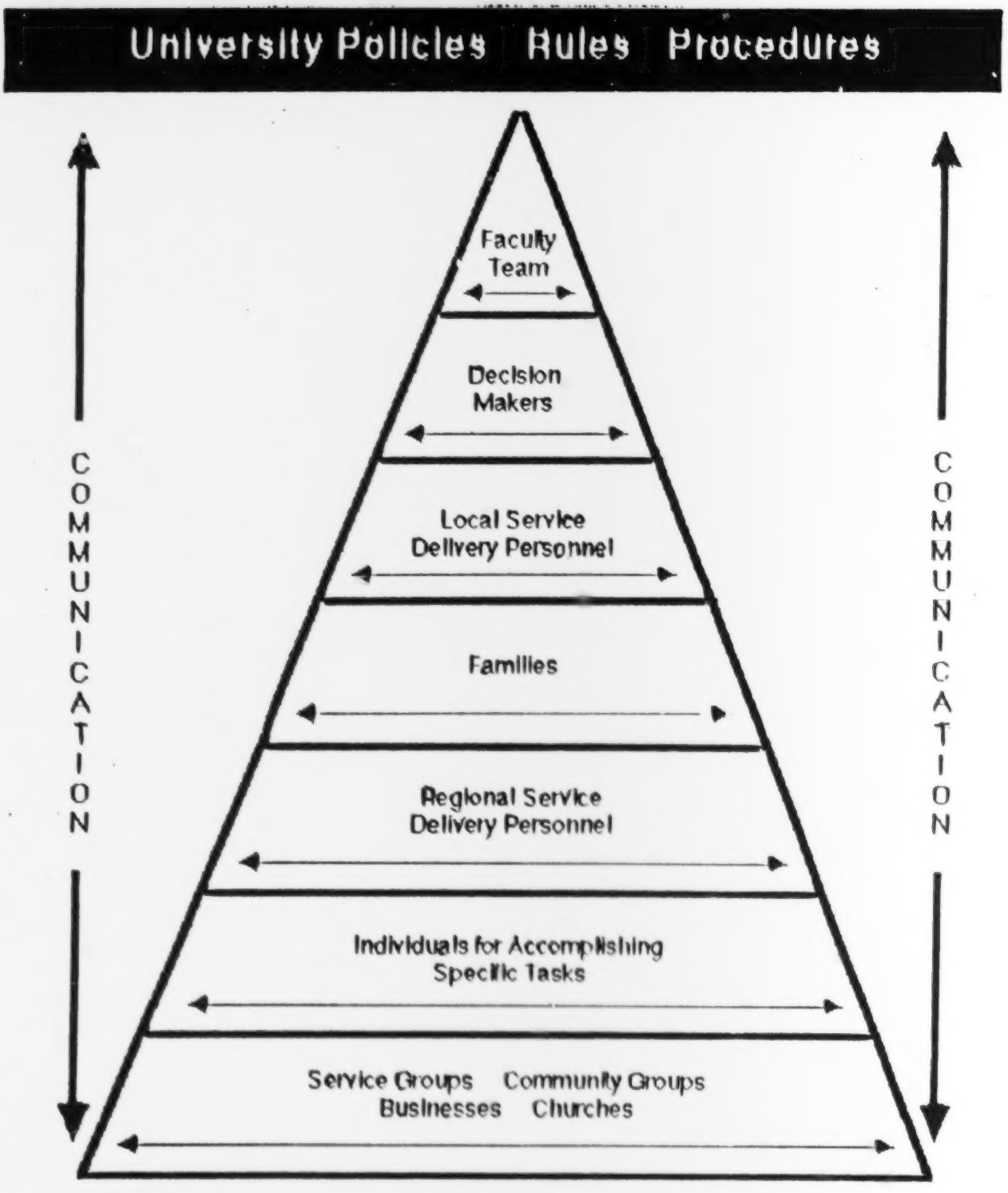
*Share resources, including expertise, materials, equipment.

*Exchange services rather than paying each other for services.

WIU College Of Education Rural Special Education Network


Establish Team Of Faculty With Similar Interest, Cooperative Work Style
Identify Team Skills
Establish Formal And Informal Contacts-
- Schools
- Private Agencies
- Medical Community
- Community
Identify university and community resources and needs that team can help fill
Secure cooperation of decision makers who will participate, plan
Determine potential funding source and vehicle to fill need
Add team members as activity requires
Plan activity to meet need
Secure funding
add people as needed
Implement activity
Disseminate Information
Evaluate on a continuous basis
Identify related needs
Identify new needs that meet group's expertise

Rural Special Education Network
Involving People



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